News Briefs

Sign up now for recreational marijuana forum on June 6
Registration is now open for the MMA’s policy forum on recreational marijuana, taking place June 6, 5–8pm at 317 on Rice Park, 317 Washington St. in downtown St. Paul. Visit www.mnmed.org/recmarijuana for more information.

The forum, “A Physician’s Take on Recreational Marijuana,” will provide an opportunity to learn more about the health effects of marijuana and what legalizing recreational marijuana could mean for Minnesota.

It will include a 45-minute panel discussion, followed by table discussions in which attendees will have the opportunity to dive deeper into the issue. Speakers include Darin J. Erickson, PhD, associate professor, Division of Epidemiology and Community Health, University of Minnesota; former MMA President David Thorson, MD, Entira Family Clinics; and Sheila Specker, MD, associate professor, Department of Psychiatry and director of Addiction Medicine Fellowship, University of Minnesota.

Following the panel, attendees will split into group discussions on the following topics:
• Youth Access to Marijuana: How does marijuana affect youth health?
• Marijuana and Pregnancy: What are the potential health effects of using marijuana during pregnancy?

Nominations still open for MMA awards
MMA members are encouraged to nominate their fellow physicians, medical trainees or advocacy champions for one of MMA’s four annual awards by June 28.

Award categories include:
• Distinguished Service Award. A physician who has made outstanding contributions in service to the MMA and on behalf of medicine and the physicians of Minnesota during his or her career.
• President’s Award. Individuals who have made outstanding contributions in service to the goals of the MMA.
• Medical Student Leadership Award. A member of the MMA Medical Student Section who demonstrates outstanding commitment to the medical profession.
• James H. Sova Memorial Award for Advocacy. Someone who has made a significant contribution to the advancement of public policy, medical sciences, medical education, medical care or the socio-economics of medical practice.

Awards will be given out at this year’s Annual Conference, September 20–21 in Duluth. Visit www.mnmed.org/awards to make your nomination.

Dates set for MMA’s book club
Planning continues on the MMA’s newest way to engage with members: Author Rounds: the MMA’s Book Club. Each event will include time to network, an introduction to the author and their book and questions and answers from the attendees. Former Minnesota Medicine editor Charles R. Meyer, MD, will serve as host.

This year’s book clubs include:
• June 18 | The Good Doctor: A Father, a Son and the Evolution of Medical Ethics by Barron H. Lerner, MD, at the Edina Barnes & Noble, 7–8:30pm. The book is a compelling story of one family’s engagement with medicine over the last half century.
• July 23 | Nerve Damage by Tom Combs, MD, at the Edina Barnes & Noble, 7–8:30pm. This novel features fictional ER physician and medical researcher Drake Cody as he tracks down a depraved killer.
• October 11 | The third event will be a virtual event that will take place from 7–8:30pm. Details with the author were being finalized as we went to press. Stay tuned to future issues for details.
Registration open for 2019 Doctors’ Lounges
Registration is now open for all of the 2019 Doctors’ Lounges taking place in Rochester, Minneapolis, Duluth, Mankato and Edina.

Since 2015, the MMA has hosted these free events, which feature food and beverages. It’s a great opportunity for physicians, residents and medical students to get together casually and network. Significant others and children are welcome, too. It’s a celebration of medicine, a thank-you to members and a welcome to new and prospective members.

- May 9: Rochester, 5–7pm at Bitter and Pour, 183rd St. SW, Lower Level
- May 21: Minneapolis, 5–7pm at the Aster Cafe, 125 St. Main Street
- September 18: Duluth, 5–7pm at Vikre Distillery, 525 Lake Avenue South, Ste. 102
- October 1: Mankato, 5–7pm at Number 4, 124 East Walnut Street
- October 24: Edina, 5–7pm at Wooden Hill Brewery, 7421 Bush Lake Road
For more information, visit www.mnnmed.org/socials.

MMA teams up with COPIC as liability insurance provider
The MMA has partnered with Colorado-based COPIC (www.copcic.com) as the association’s endorsed medical professional liability insurance (MPLI) provider for its members.

COPIC provides medical liability insurance that goes beyond basic coverage to offer educational resources, expert guidance and proven programs designed to address health care risks and improve outcomes. COPIC is the preferred MPLI provider in Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska, Utah and North and South Dakota. COPIC’s network of insured entities includes more than 8,000 physicians and more than 160 hospitals and health care facilities.

“COPIC stands apart from other carriers in its commitment to improving health care and providing support to help ensure the best in patient care,” says MMA Board of Trustees Chair Randy Rice, MD. “One of our primary goals is to make Minnesota the best state to practice medicine, and we believe our partnership with COPIC will help us achieve this while also offering our members a better option for medical liability insurance.”

“COPIC is honored to have been chosen as an MMA partner and we look forward to demonstrating our commitment to health care in Minnesota,” says Gerald Zarlengo, MD, CEO of COPIC. “We focus on collaborating with state medical societies and their members, and when we work together, we can generate new and impactful ways to support improvements in patient safety and risk management.”

The MMA encourages members to contact their current MPLI agent or Jerry O'Connell (joconnell@copic.com), COPIC’s director, Regional Development, at 844-858-1411, ext. 6182, to learn more about what COPIC offers and to receive a premium indication, which includes a 5 percent discount for MMA members.

State distributes opioid reports to Minnesota prescribers
Minnesota physicians who treat Minnesota Health Care Program (MHCP) members and prescribe opioids for pain management will receive individualized Opioid Prescribing Reports this spring from the Department of Human Services (DHS) as required by law.

DHS will send the first reports this spring to MN-ITS mailboxes. The reports compare each prescriber’s prescribing data to their peers in their specialty. To access a report, a prescriber must register for a MN-ITS account, which is a free, web-based HIPAA-compliant system for electronic billing and communication with providers.

DHS sent out customized MN-ITS registration letters to all opioid-prescribing providers who do not currently have a MN-ITS account, via U.S. Postal Service, in late March. Prescribers who are managed care only will not receive MN-ITS registration letters. Their reports will be sent via the U.S. Postal Service for the first year.

Training on how to access your report in the MN-ITS mailbox will become available before the release of the reports. DHS will provide a link to the training on the Opioid Prescribing Improvement Program website and the Provider news and updates webpage.

The Opioid Prescribing Reports will support the DHS Opioid Prescribing Quality Improvement Program. See the Opioid Prescribing Improvement Program website for more information, including the “Flip the Script” resources on talking with patients about pain management and opioid use.

For more information, contact the MHCP Provider Call Center at 651-431-2700 or 800-366-5411. Direct questions about the Opioid Prescribing Reports to dhs.opioid@state.mn.us.

Judge rules against United Behavioral Health
In March, a federal judge ruled that United Behavioral Health, UnitedHealth Group’s behavioral health insurer, breached its duty to patients and made arbitrary and capricious coverage denials by using restrictive coverage determination policies that deviated from clinical guidelines.

The ruling stems from a class action lawsuit brought on behalf of approximately 50,000 patients who were denied coverage for residential mental health and substance use disorder treatment. Under federal law, self-insured health plans are obligated to administer health plan benefits “solely in the interest of the participants and beneficiaries ... [and with] care, skill, prudence, and diligence.”

The court found that determining coverage using criteria that deviated from established standards of care violated the fiduciary duty that was owed to patients.

At issue in the recently decided case, Wit v. United Behavioral Health, were internal United Behavioral Health coverage determination policies that were significantly more restrictive than the standard of care. These guidelines, according to plaintiffs, focused on acute symptoms rather than chronic conditions, inappropriately limiting coverage to treatment that would alleviate
symptoms instead of treatment that would address an individual’s underlying condition.

This “overemphasis on acuity,” the court ruled, resulted in inappropriate denials of coverage for patients and violated federal law. Although federal and state law generally require health plans to provide mental health and substance use disorder benefits at levels equal to other medical or surgical benefits, patients continue to struggle to obtain coverage for treatment of mental health and substance use disorders. This decision, if upheld on appeal, could provide a legal avenue for patients to ensure that they receive adequate coverage for treatment of mental health and substance use disorders.

**MMA staff to meet with physicians across the state**

MMA staff will tour the state this summer to meet with physicians, and to listen to what’s important to them, their clinics and their patients. Here’s the schedule:

- Northwest Trustee District: June 10–12
- North Central Trustee District: June 17–19
- Southwest Trustee District: July 15–17
- Northeast Trustee District: July 29–31
- Southeast Trustee District: August 5–7
- Twin Cities Trustee District: Contact staff for availability

If the dates that staff will be in your Trustee District don’t work, please let us know and we’ll find an alternative time. If you are interested in scheduling a meeting or presentation, please contact Elizabeth Anderson (eanderson@mnmed.org).

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**MMA in Action**

**MMA CEO Janet Silversmith, Dave Renner, MMA director of advocacy; and Eric Dick, manager of state legislative affairs, met in early April with Cassandra Moore, policy advisor to Gov. Tim Walz, to discuss MMA’s provider tax alternative proposal.**

Silversmith, Renner, Dick and Andrea Stoesz, health policy analyst, met with Department of Human Services Commissioner Tony Lourey and State Medicaid Director Marie Zimmerman in late March to discuss the governor’s ONECare proposal.

Silversmith, Renner, Dick and Juli-ana Milhofer, policy analyst, joined several physicians in early March to meet with Sen. Melissa Franzen to discuss her recreational marijuana proposal.

In early March, Silversmith met with new University of Minnesota Physicians CEO Badrinath Konety, MD, and, along with Scott Wilson, membership outreach manager, met with David Herman, MD, Essentia Health CEO.

Silversmith and Elizabeth Anderson, membership director, met with representatives of Sanford Health in late April.

MMA members Kim Tjaden, MD, and Marilyn Peitso, MD, and Anderson met with Tom Schrup, MD, at CentraCare in mid-March.

In late March, Renner presented legislative issues to the Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians’ House of Delegates. In late April, he also presented to the Mankato Clinic Board of Directors.

Anderson and Wilson attended the MAFP Spring Refresher in late March as well as the MMGMA Winter Conference in early March.

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**Congratulations to George Lohmer for his 40 years of service to the Minnesota Medical Association**

Best wishes in your retirement

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**MM**